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ABSTRACT

This study was designed to determine (1) the arrow, dart, javelin, and pin games of Native American girls and women of the Great Plains, (2) the geographical spread of the games within the culture area, and (3) the characteristics of the various games. Data for this investigation were researched from "Annual Reports of the Bureau of American Ethnology, Smithsonian Institution", and "American Anthropoligist". The games of ring and pin and snowsnake were played during the period under observation. The ring and pin game consisted of thrusting a needle-like object through multiple targets which were strung on a thong with a needle. The implements of the game were similar throughout the culture area. Snowsnake was a game where a javelin-like stick was thrown across a hard surface to outdistance opponents. Snowsnake generally was played in ice or hard packed snow, but on paths, roads, or bare ground. Ring and pin had some limited ceremonial significance; no rituals accompanied snowsnake, nor was it a part of a ceremony. (Author/CD)

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JAVELIN, ARROW, DART, AND PIN GAMES OF NATIVE AMERICAN WOMEN OF THE PLAINS

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The playing of athletic games was common to the culture of the Native North American. While the literature generally referred to the games of the male, it was evident that Native American Indian girls and women also had their repertoire of games which were a part of their culture.

To enable convenient distinctions to be made concerning the American Indian, it has been customary to divide the North American continent into culture areas. No Indian group so caught the fancy of the twentieth century as did the Plains Indian. The Great Plains, a sea of grass that sustained the buffalo, also nurtured the tribesmen who became the stereotype of the American Indian.

Problem

The problem under investigation concerned itself with the following: (1) determining the javelin, arrow, dart, and pin games of Native American girls and women of the Great Plains, (2) determining the geographical spread of the games within the culture area, and (3) determining the characteristics of the various games.

Procedure and Definitions

Data for this investigation were researched from the forty-eight Annual Reports of the Bureau of American Ethnology, Smithsonian Institution published from 1881 to 1933 and the eighty-four volumes of the American Anthropologist published

from 1888 to 1974. The data represent observations made from 1882 to 1932 with the vast majority made during the nineteenth century.

Terms basic to the investigation were defined:

(1) Javelin, arrow, dart, and pin games. A contest utilizing missile-like objects which were thrown, shot, or thrust at a target.

(2) Great Plains Indian. Those Indians that lived in that geographical area of North America lying roughly between the Mississippi River and the Rocky Mountains and between the Saskatchewan River and the Rio Grande River. During the golden age of the Plains Indian, some thirty tribes lived in the Great Plains culture area, the best known of which were the Arapaho, Arikara, Assiniboin, Gros Ventre, Blackfoot, Cheyenne, Comanche, Crow, Hidatsa, Oto, Pawnee, Ponca, Sioux, and Wichita according to Dee Brown.

Results

American Indian javelin, arrow, dart, and pin games were archery, darts, hoop and pole, ring and pin, and snowsnake. From the data researched the games of ring and pin and snowsnake were the sole javelin, arrow, dart, and pin games of Native American girls and women of the Great Plains. Archery, darts, and hoop and pole did not exist as participatory recreations for them.

Of the thirty tribes cited by Brown as belonging to the Great Plains culture area, or thirty-one as cited by Wissler, girls and women from eight Plains tribes played ring and pin and/or snowsnake; the Arapaho, Assiniboin, Cheyenne, Plains Cree, Brule' Dakota, Oglala Dakota, Teton Dakota, and Gros Ventre. All eight of the tribeswomen possessed ring and pin while six

possessed snowsnake, the exceptions being the Brule' Dakota and the Gros Ventre.

Essentially the ring and pin game consisted of thrusting a needle-like object through multiple perforated targets which were strung on a thong with the needle. The game was analogous to the so called "universal" game of cup and ball.

Ring and pin, commonly called the courtship or matrimonial game, was played by Plains Native American women from Algonquian and Siouan tribes extending from the North to the South of the culture area; from the Assiniboin, Plains Cree, and Gros Ventre in Montana and Wyoming, to the Brule', Oglala, and Teton Dakota in South Dakota, and the Arapaho and Cheyenne in Oklahoma.

Throughout the culture area ring and pin either was a game played by both men and women or by women alone. Generally both men and women played the game; they either played together or with members of the same sex. In no instance did men of the tribe possess the game without women also possessing the game or a feminine equivalent.

Ring and pin was a game played by any number of participants from two upward. Beyond the lover's game where the number of participants was two, the citations did not indicate any perference for teams composed of specific numbers of players.

The "ring and pin" or implements of the game were uncommonly similar throughout the culture area. With two exceptions, the "ring" was a number of deer phalangeal bones, from four to eight, four being the most common number. In singular examples, bear bones were strung as the "ring" by the Cheyennes while one Plains

Cree implement omitted any cup-like ring and contained only a perforated buckskin flap as a target. The cylindrical cone-shaped deer bones generally were perforated, which permitted scoring by thrusting the needle in a transverse axis in addition to the longitudinal axis. These bones were strung on deerskin thongs or beaded cords with the large ends of the cup-like bones toward the needle. At times the bones were separated from one another by small loops of beads called earrings. Either larger loops of glass beads or perforated flaps of buckskin were attached to the end of the thong opposite the "pin". These, too, were targets for scoring. The thrusting instrument most resembled a long needle and was made of bone, iron, or brass. The original "pin" was the woman's sewing awl according to a Cheyenne explanation.

In scoring, the greatest number of points was won by spearing the beaded end-loops or buckskin endpiece. Spearing the bones along their horizontal axis was rewarded with numbers of points approximately one-fifth the size of a speared endpiece. Thrusts into small intermediary loops or transverse perforations rewarded the fewest number of points. When two people played, the game generally was approximately fifty points. When larger teams played, games could go as high as two thousand points as with the Cheyenne game.

Ring and pin had some limited ceremonial significance. The Arapaho, Assiniboin, Cheyenne, and Gros Ventre, either currently or previously, had played ring and pin as a lover's game wherein each party could indicate his acceptance of the game partner as a marriage partner. In olden times, a Cheyenne

team game continued until noon when the losing team prepared a feast for all.

Among the Cree and Teton Dakota gambling for stakes put up by each player took place. Both men and women from these two tribes played the game, men with men and women with women.

Snowsnake also was a major game of Plains girls and women. Essentially it was a game where a javelin-like stick was thrown across ice or hard snow or ground to outdistance opponents. The distance traveled was measured to the point the snowsnake stopped its forward movement. The data produced evidence that snowsnake was played by six Siouan and Algonquian Plains tribeswomen; the Arapaho, Assiniboin, Cheyenne, Plains Cree and Oglala and Teton Dakota.

The geographical area in which the game was played was extensive; it included not only Oklahoma occupied by the Arapaho and Cheyenne, South Dakota by the Oglala and Teton Dakota, Montana by Assiniboin and Cheyenne, but also Saskatchewan by the Plains Cree.

Snowsnake generally seemed to have been considered a young person's game in the Great Plains. When the game was present for female participation in the tribal culture, it usually was considered a girls' or womans' game. In a minority of cultures, the game belonged to men, women, and children.

Snowsnake was a game played by any number of participants from two upward. The citations did not indicate any preference for teams composed of specific numbers of players.

The snowsnake varied considerably in length. Generally the missile was from four to six feet long as with the Arapaho, Assiniboin, Cheyenne, and Oglala and Teton Dakota. However, the Cree snowsnake was a carved dart but eight inches long. The longer snake was constructed of peeled willow sapling tipped with a conical shaped point of carved buffalo horn, perhaps five inches long. Such a horned tip enabled the snowsnake to slide more easily and it also provided protection for the sapling from spliting. Snowsnakes commonly were painted or decorated with burnt markings for which no significance was cited.

Snowsnake generally was played on ice or hard packed snow as with the Northern tribes, but it also was played on paths, roads, or bare ground as with the Arapaho and Cheyenne of Oklahoma. Snowsnakes which were long and stick-like in form were thrown with an underarm pendulum-like motion. The forefinger was curled behind the end of the snake with the thumb on one side and the last three fingers on the opposite side of the snake in supporting roles. The Cree variation of the game, with its short dart snake, constructed a narrow track down the side of a snow-covered hill for a distance of sixty feet or more. The track was iced and the dart started moving by its own weight; it was not shoved or thrown. The track was barred by four snow barriers about ten feet apart. The object of this variation was to pass through as many barriers as possible and not leave the track. Numerous turnings could take the place of snow barriers.

At times snowsnake was played for stakes which included brass bracelets, silver rings, earbobs, sashes, and shawls as with the Arapaho and Teton Dakota. No rituals accompanied the game nor was it a part of any ceremony.

Conclusion

Based upon the accounts from which the data were drawn, during the later quarter of the nineteenth century North American Indian women of the Great Plains played two javelin, arrow, dart or pin games--ring and pin and snowsnake--throughout an extensive geographical area that extended from Saskatchewan to Oklahoma. For the most part, the characteristics and implements of the game of ring and pin were uncommonly similar; the same was true in the game of snowsnake.